

Veganism and the Torah
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Hi, I'm Lori and I'm an aspiring Vegan. It's been 5 years since I've eaten meat.

What does Veganism have to do with the Torah?

Veganism pertains to consuming only plant-based products. That includes not eating fish, dairy, or eggs. The most strict Vegans do not wear any clothing coming from an animal, such as leather and wool.

3 Reasons for Becoming a Vegan

1. Ethical - concern for animals' welfare and the humane treatment of all animals and fish. In modern factory farms there are many instances of mistreatment of animals including raising them in crowded, confined areas where they are denied sunlight and space to roam.

2. Health - Consuming a more balanced diet, with plant-based protein, has many health benefits, such as lower risk for cancer, heart disease.

3. Environmental - preventing overuse of vital resources, which factory farming and overfishing have caused. Factory farms cause soil erosion, water pollution, and overuse of water.

The Torah emphasizes the importance of treating animals humanely through the mitzvah of *tsa-ar ba-alei chayim* - prevention of cruelty to animals. In Gen. 24:11-20 Rebecca is chosen as a wife for Isaac, because of her compassion for Eliezer's camels when she not only draws water from the well for Eliezer, but she also gives water to the camels.

In Exodus Rabbah 2:2 Moses is tending Jethro's sheep when a lamb wanders off to Hasua to a pool of water and stops to drink. When Moses realizes that the lamb is thirsty, he assumes that she must also be tired. He carries her on his shoulder. G-d then chooses Moses to lead the people because of his compassion for the animals.

In Exodus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 5:14 domestic animals, as well as humans must rest on Shabbat.

Health - In Genesis 1:29 G-d shows his intention for people to be vegetarians. He states, "I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for fruit." Only later do the Kashrut laws come into play to deal with man's lust for meat. They are established to elevate eating and give one self-restraint. In *Hilkhot Deot (4:1)* RamBam writes, *"Since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of G-d, for one cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator if he is ill, therefore, one must avoid that which harms the body and accustom oneself to that which is healthy and helps the body become stronger."*

Lastly, the Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam "repairing the world" is at the forefront of environmentalism. In addition, there is the commandment Bal tashchit - do not destroy or waste, which appears in Deuteronomy 20:19-20. In war when a city is besieged you are not permitted to cut down or destroy any fruit trees.

In conclusion, by aspiring to follow a Vegan lifestyle one is in keeping with the teachings of the Torah through showing compassion for animals, caring for one's body/health, and preserving creation through caring for the environment.